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## **The Empirical Science Paradigm (ESP) and the Liberal Arts Paradigm (LAP) in Translation Studies**

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Traditionally, approaches in research are divided into two main paradigms. Paradigms are philosophical and theoretical frameworks that provide researchers with ethical norms and rules that reflect what is regarded as "science" or even "good science". Depending on the fields of research, in textbooks, the two paradigms are referred to with different terms like, for example:

- inductive/empirical research – deductive/rationalistic research;
- data-oriented research – hermeneutic research;
- empirically oriented research 'empiricism' – interpretive theoretical research.

In short, empirical research, the main paradigm of natural sciences, is exploration of reality based on data and facts and providing systematic evidence. Non-empirical research, mostly known from the humanities, is regarded as the philosophical and theoretical investigation of texts (but also manifestations of life) – using interpretation, argumentation and rationale.

Scholars from the two camps tend to criticize each other, in social sciences, see for example, Alvesson/Sköldberg (2000), and in Translation Studies, Stolze (2003). What is held against empirical research is that it is a-theoretical and that whatever we observe, it is always influenced by language, selective perception, i.e. a degree of subjectivity, because nobody approaches reality as a *tabula rasa*. The non-empirical, philosophical and theoretical approaches are criticized for being speculative, intuitive and less solid than empirical research.

The terms and the division into the two main paradigms are problematic – not only in Translation Studies, but also in other disciplines like, for example business studies and sociology. Rough divisions like "ESP" and "LAP" (Gile (2005) and "ERP" and "LAP" create generalizations which would need further investigation and support by systematic evidence. What is, for example, the exact extension of the term Liberal Arts Paradigm? Liberal Arts comprise among others hermeneutics, structuralism, constructivism, critical theory, discourse analysis, etc. – all of them with their special research objects, rules and traditions, which by researchers from other paradigms may be regarded as more or less "scientific" and more or less solid.

Having a large group of disciplines under the umbrella of the Liberal Arts Paradigm in mind – can it then be generalized that LAP is less rigorous than empirical scientific research? A look at some of the research skills required in text books in relation to the two main paradigms shows that it is not totally different skills that are asked for in order to do empirical research or hermeneutic research (as an example from the LAP). However, what is most interesting and important in this connection is that Translation Studies of all disciplines absolutely cannot make do without *both* paradigms. Regarding the research skills, see appendix!

## References

Alvesson, M. and Sköldböck, K. 2000. *Reflexive Methodology*. London. Sage.

Gile, D. 2005. "The liberal arts paradigm and the empirical science paradigm." [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org): Research issue January 22.

Gile, D. 2008. "Where is the evidence? On one limitation of the Empirical Research Paradigms." [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org): Research issue December 2008.

Stolze, R. 2003. *Hermeneutik und Translation*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

## Appendix: Research Skills

### Empirical research

ability to categorize  
 ability to listen and to explain  
 ability to see relevant data  
 ability to see links  
 ability to spot new possibilities  
 being realistic  
 being well read  
 being careful  
 fresh look  
 empathy  
 skeptical attitude  
 open-mindedness  
 patience  
 reflectivity  
 rigor  
 self-criticism  
 sensibility  
 social interaction  
 thoroughness

### Hermeneutics

ability to ask questions  
 ability to check plausibility  
 ability to judge  
 comprehensiveness  
 creativity  
 dialectic approach  
 empathy  
 honesty  
 humble activity  
 intuition  
 logic argumentation  
 openness as to different possibilities/positions  
 overview  
 respect as to the interpreted issue  
 seeing relations/patterns  
 skill to see alternatives  
 thoroughness  
 understanding the parts – and the whole  
 understanding of meaning